

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Julie Lerner
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Carmel Del Mar Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 12345 Carmel Park Drive
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City San Diego State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 92130-2222

County San Diego County

Telephone (858) 481-6789 Fax (858) 481-7418

Web site/URL https://carmeldelmar.dmusd.org/ E-mail jlerner@dmusd.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Holly McClurg Ph.D. E-mail hmcclurg@dmusd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Del Mar Union School District Tel. (858) 755-9301

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Erica Halpern
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	42	49	91
1	51	51	102
2	51	46	97
3	45	38	83
4	38	49	87
5	47	36	83
6	40	43	83
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	314	312	626

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 35.7 % Asian
 - 1.6 % Black or African American
 - 2.9 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 52.6 % White
 - 7 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 10%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	40
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	22
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	62
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	626
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Arabic, Bengali, ASL, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Farsi, Filipino, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Mandarin, Marathi, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Ukrainian, Vietnamese.

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 12 %
75 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6 %

Total number students who qualify: 40

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %

45 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

7 Autism

0 Multiple Disabilities

0 Deafness

1 Orthopedic Impairment

0 Deaf-Blindness

6 Other Health Impaired

0 Developmental Delay

10 Specific Learning Disability

0 Emotional Disturbance

34 Speech or Language Impairment

1 Hearing Impairment

0 Traumatic Brain Injury

2 Intellectual Disability

2 Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	26
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

CDM, the School with a Heart, is grounded in our collective commitment to doing what is best for all of our students - academically, socially and emotionally.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

On August 3, 2020 the California Department of Public Health released updated guidance to support schools with safely reopening. Based on this guidance, the Del Mar Union School District worked in consultation with the County of San Diego Health and Human Services to finalize a districtwide K-6 Safe Reopening Plan. This plan provided a framework for Carmel Del Mar School to put together a “Safe Reopening Committee” made up of staff and parents that worked collaboratively with the administration to develop our site-based Safe Reopening Plan. Our district and site-based plans were submitted to the California Department of Public Health for approval to reopen our schools for a full-day, five day per week, in-person learning opportunity for students as early as September 8, 2020. The plan outlined the site specific protocols for maintaining proper hygiene, ensuring physical distancing, and remaining in cohorts to limit student mixing. In addition to the in-person learning option, families could elect to enroll their student in “Launch,” our full-day, five day per week, year-long districtwide distance learning program.

August 24, 2020 was the first day of school for all of our students. As the district waited to receive approval from the California Department of Public Health to reopen our in-person learning program, students across the district, including at Carmel Del Mar, began the year remotely. After we received approval from the California Department of Public Health to resume in-person instruction, approximately 400 students that began the year working remotely with their teachers and classmates, returned to campus for full-time, five days per week instruction beginning on

Tuesday, September 8th. Carmel Del Mar and all other schools in the Del Mar Union School District were the first elementary schools to open for full time, five days a week in-person learning in San Diego County. Additionally, approximately 200 of our students whose families elected for their children to attend Launch, also began their instructional year on August 24, 2020 and will continue in the distance learning program until our last day of instruction.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

Carmel Del Mar School (CDM), home of the Dragons, welcomes and educates neighborhood children from kindergarten through sixth grade. When CDM opened its doors to students in 1992, it was the third school in the Del Mar Union School District in San Diego County, which has since grown to eight schools. The members of our school community are proud of our longstanding tradition of providing educational excellence throughout the past twenty-eight school years. Affectionately referred to as “The School with a Heart,” we have an ongoing commitment to educating the whole child, a staff and parent community dedicated to meeting the academic and social emotional needs of every Dragon, and a student body that is motivated to learn and achieve.

It is our collective goal at CDM to create a learning environment that is nurturing, rigorous, innovative and responsive in providing students with the tools they will need for success in our rapidly changing global society. We aspire to help every student realize their individual potential through our challenging and differentiated academic program. This begins with a schoolwide commitment to guiding decisions based on what is best for students. We recognize that while our curriculum and school initiatives act as a cohesive vehicle to deliver a comprehensive and equitable standards-based education, it is our staff that brings learning to life for our students. Our teachers utilize the Essential Elements of Instruction and Cultures of Thinking frameworks to guide lesson delivery and instructional decisions. Teachers use Thinking Routines to make student thinking visible and valued, provide multiple entry points for learning, honor diverse perspectives and background experiences, and deepen content understanding of key standards and skills.

Our CDM Dragons are inquisitive, creative, and highly engaged in their learning process. We celebrate the development of the whole child by providing meaningful instruction and learning opportunities that promote introspection, curiosity, effective communication and collaboration. Through our STEAM+ program, we offer classes taught by credentialed specialists in the areas of visual arts, performing arts, physical education, scientific investigation and integrated Design Thinking for all K-6 students. Additionally, our staff and parents work together to provide a variety of elective programs during lunch and before and after school for students to explore their interests, develop new friendships, and receive academic support and enrichment.

With 28 different languages represented in our community and 18% of our students attending CDM as first-generation students, we celebrate our rich diversity and encourage our students to view themselves as agents of social change. Our school community facilitates opportunities for students to learn more about their own cultural beliefs and backgrounds while also seeing into the lives experienced by others. Students learn invaluable skills including developing healthy relationships and effective problem-solving strategies through our Second Step Social-Emotional Learning program. The language, tools and strategies introduced via the program are reinforced by staff and families, and assist our Dragons with navigating their way through school and the world around them. Additionally, we are taking action to combat acts of bullying, bias, and the escalation of hate prevalent in schools and communities throughout the United States by actively participating in the No Place for Hate movement and encouraging our students to become agents for social change.

We believe that building relationships is critical to meaningful collaboration and student success. To that end, we encourage the support and involvement of our families, community members, and community partners as we work together to meet the unique needs of each one of our students. Our CDM families work hard to live in this community and are highly supportive and involved with all aspects of our school program. Parents generously share their time and resources to support our school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA), they volunteer thousands of hours each year to support classroom instruction, co-facilitate extracurricular activities for students, and attend school sponsored events. Families are also highly supportive of the Del Mar Schools Education Foundation, which assists our school with annual fundraising in support of the STEAM+ program. Finally, we are grateful our parents support our administration and staff in making shared-decisions about what’s best for all of our students. Through active participation on various committees our parents collaborate with staff to analyze student data and trends, make recommendations for the ongoing review and evaluation of school improvement programs, and inform the annual update of our

Site Strategic Plan.

When all stakeholders feel they are valued members of a learning community, they develop a sense of ownership and efficacy that transforms teaching and learning. The entire CDM community is committed to providing an enriched and balanced educational experience for all Dragons. Our high-performing staff, coupled with our strong parent partnerships, makes CDM an outstanding place for children to learn.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The educational program at CDM is grounded in a strong academic core delivered through high-quality instruction. We pride ourselves in developing standards-aligned and meaningful learning opportunities that are integrated across disciplines to ensure all students develop the essential skills and competencies to be college and career ready. Utilizing a guaranteed and viable curriculum provides for consistent and equitable instructional practices across grade-levels and within distance learning and in-person classrooms, and supports vertical articulation between teachers as our students transition from one grade-level to the next.

Within our in-person and distance learning classrooms, CDM teachers utilize research-based practices including the Essential Elements of Instruction and the Cultures of Thinking frameworks, to guide lesson design and delivery and shape our instructional culture. Across all content areas, students engage in a variety of Thinking Routines to make their thinking visible and deepen content understanding of key standards or skills. These routines meet the needs of every student on their individual learning continuum, while providing for rich discussion and rigorous application of targeted skills. During the school closures in March through June of 2020, all classrooms at CDM went remote and our teachers collaborated with colleagues and the administration to pilot a variety of digital tools that supported teachers with delivering synchronous and asynchronous instruction. The feedback received, coupled with our own collective experiences, supported our staff with selecting uniform digital tools to organize, deliver, and assess student learning within in-person and distance learning environments during the 2020-2021 school year.

To proactively prepare for a situation in which a COVID-19 case requires an in-person classroom to quarantine and transition to remote learning, both in-person and distance learning teachers utilize Google Classroom as our learning management system. Google Classroom supports teachers with organizing weekly learning objectives and assignments, differentiating learning opportunities for students, and providing feedback on work submitted. Teachers also use Zoom and its applications including breakout rooms and annotation tools to provide synchronous targeted skill instruction to students through whole group lessons, small focus groups, and individual guidance. Formative assessment measures are routinely used to monitor and adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Over the past several years we have focused on establishing a dynamic balanced literacy program which includes the selection of curriculum and ongoing professional learning. In reading and English Language Arts, our teachers pre-assess students at the beginning of each unit to identify their prior knowledge of key standards or skills, and adjust instruction accordingly. Teachers make learning meaningful by engaging students in inquiry-based learning around the ELA objectives and in conjunction with cross-curricular studies. To support students with meeting grade-level writing standards across the three genres of narrative, expository, and opinion writing, our teachers utilize an explicit and multi-sensory instructional program and evaluate student performance using standards-aligned rubrics developed for each grade level.

In mathematics, our teachers use a variety of instructional approaches including direct and small group instruction, as well as hands-on experiences, to blend foundational skill development with problem-solving applications. The emphasis is on building conceptual understanding rather than focusing on an answer, or rote memorization. Our teachers are trained in implementing Cognitively Guided Instruction. This problem solving approach to conceptually based mathematics promotes a culture focused on student thinking and understanding of mathematics. Teachers use questioning strategies to support all learners with demonstrating their individual understanding of math concepts, and adjust instruction as needed to assist each student with reaching their next level of learning. This approach also creates environments where diversity of thinking is valued as all students engage in conversations around mathematical understanding. While formative assessment strategies are foundational to this instructional approach, teachers also evaluate student understanding on core content standards using common grade-level benchmarks.

At CDM it is our goal to engage students in making meaningful connections between the world around them and the content standards learned. Our teachers integrate English Language Arts units of study with Next Generation Science Standards and Social Studies/Civic Literacy standards to support students with making

cross-curricular connections. Through guided discovery, teachers introduce science and social studies lessons with a question and facilitate investigations through questioning, researching, experimentation, and explanation. Students also use the Design Thinking process to apply content knowledge learned toward addressing relevant, real-world problems. For example, while studying biological evolution within their life science unit, third graders visit the San Elijo Lagoon and learn about the environmental and human impacts on the health of animal and plant species inhabiting the Lagoon. The students identified such problems as storm runoff bringing pollutants into the Lagoon and hikers going off trail and destroying native plant and animal habitats, and utilized the school's Makerspace to design and exhibit prototypes of their solutions.

Teachers assess student understanding of science and social studies standards through formative assessment strategies, including student portfolios and exhibitions of learning. Students document their own learning journey using a variety of platforms including Google Sites and Slides, SeeSaw, and Flipgrid. During exhibitions, students share their Design Thinking projects with the community and receive actionable feedback to guide and extend their learning.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At CDM, we believe that it is our collective responsibility to prepare our students with the skills and mindsets to become productive members of the global society. These skills not only encompass a strong foundation in the core academic areas of literacy, math, social studies, and science, but also extend to the instruction of what we refer to as “the skills that matter most.” This includes supporting students with developing interpersonal skills such as feeling empathy for others, listening to new perspectives, promoting creativity and curiosity, and learning tools for effective communication and collaboration. Our parents and staff view these skills as prerequisites for college and career readiness, and we work collaboratively to provide access to high-quality learning experiences that foster these skills in all students.

The STEAM+ program at CDM, blends interdisciplinary instruction in the areas of visual arts, performing arts, physical education, scientific investigation and integrated Design Thinking to encourage students to think critically, explore solutions to real-world problems, and unleash creativity. All CDM students, K-6, receive weekly STEAM+ instruction led by a team of credentialed specialists from each discipline. Under our current health guidelines, our STEAM+ specialists instruct in-person students by utilizing outdoor spaces to socially-distance, teach from the doorway of a classroom, or use Zoom to co-teach the day's lesson in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Our specialists in the distance learning program instruct students through a combination of weekly synchronous and asynchronous lessons.

This year, an Integration Specialist position was added to the STEAM+ program with the goal of co-planning highly engaging and integrated units of study around a specific NGSS or Social Studies/Civic Literacy standards with the grade-level classroom teachers. For example, during our fifth grade NGSS earth science unit, “Human Impacts on Earth Systems,” our Integration Specialist and classroom teachers co-taught a Design Thinking unit on the differences between environmental causes for wildfires versus human causes. Throughout the unit students learned about the natural conditions and human behaviors that contribute to destructive wildfires throughout California. After exploring the environmental, economic, humanitarian, and health impacts of wildfires, students designed solutions to mitigate the human impacts that lead to wildfires. Students worked with a local wildlife non-profit to develop a messaging campaign to raise awareness about the issue for elementary age students.

In addition to supporting the STEAM+ program, our staff and parents work together to facilitate a variety of extracurricular offerings based on student interests during lunch periods and after-school. Such opportunities

include the Science Field Day, Jr. Olympics, and the Dragon Math Club. Our Art and Science Specialists partner to offer such integrated lunch club offerings as Botanical Illustration and Architecture. Additionally, interested students in grades 3-6 can participate in Zoo Crew, Student Council, Student Led Yearbook, and the Green Team. While most of these traditional opportunities were not available to students this year due to COVID-19 restrictions, teachers worked in collaboration with students and the administration to rethink how our programs could be adapted to meet the health and safety guidelines. In many cases, this meant teaching outdoors, meeting virtually, and strategically cohorting students.

3. Academic Supports:

Schools that enhance learning for all students use research and data to refine practice and involve everyone in the improvement process. At CDM our staff embraces a community of “we,” viewing all students as “our students.” We work collaboratively to flex all available resources to ensure that every student meets or exceeds grade-level standards. This begins with teachers working in grade-level and vertical articulation teams to regularly evaluate student data. While we recognize that one individual assessment alone doesn’t determine what a student needs or how best to support their learning, we value the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues across grade-level and vertical articulation teams to review multiple measures of student data and establish goals for student learning.

Our K-6 teachers use data collected across multiple measures to identify and place students performing below and significantly above grade-level into targeted and need-based instructional groups. To begin, teachers review summative and interim student performance data in English Language Arts and mathematics using the California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance (grades 3-6) and the i-Ready diagnostic (K-6). Teachers also analyze the results of the annual English Language Proficiency Assessment for California to identify the current language levels and needs of our K-6 English Learners. As an additional measure, teachers regularly use formative assessment data from our adopted reading and math programs to differentiate instruction, and provide individualized and small group supports.

The health and safety guidelines outlined for the 2020-2021 school year provided our special education team and classroom teachers the unique opportunity to reevaluate how we provide instructional support for students with special needs. Rather than pulling students out of the general education classroom to receive small group or individualized instruction, our team of specialists and paraprofessionals push into our in-person and distance learning classrooms to co-teach and provide just-in-time support in language arts and math for students requiring supplemental instruction in a specific skill area or needing extended learning opportunities. These groups are designed to be fluid and responsive to the needs of students. Grade-level teachers regularly collaborate with the support team to review formative classroom assessment data and regroup students based on their current instructional needs.

In addition to the targeted support provided for students during the instructional day, our staff and parents collaborate to offer several before and after-school learning intervention and enrichment opportunities for students in the areas of reading and mathematics. Prior to the school day, intensive reading support is offered for students in grades 3-6 through the “Read Naturally” program to support fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension development. In mathematics, our “Math 24” class invites and engages all K-6 students and an accompanying family member in problem-solving and math games one morning each week. Additionally, we offer “Dragon Math,” a parent facilitated before-school math opportunity, for our fifth and sixth grade students that enjoy solving highly challenging math problems.

We believe that providing our teachers time to work in communities of practice to review and

discuss student work samples, co-plan lessons, and tailor instructional decisions based on the individual needs of students, provides for equitable access to learning for all students and promotes a culture of achievement.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Carmel Del Mar is affectionately known as “The School With a Heart.” Our staff and families embrace a community of “we,” to ensure that every student achieves to their fullest potential- academically, socially, and emotionally. We believe that in order to teach our students, we must first reach them, and this begins with nurturing their social-emotional competence and valuing the individual genius within each child.

In 2015, Carmel Del Mar was the first school in the district to pilot and adopt Second Step as our universal, classroom-based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program. Our K-6 teachers instruct weekly lessons covering such topics as emotion regulation, forming healthy relationships, making good decisions, and conflict resolution within our distance learning and in-person classrooms. The language used in the program supports students through productive problem-solving and promotes a culture of accepting all Dragons as learners, friends and citizens. With the understanding that a holistic and coordinated SEL program builds stronger communities that support inclusive and equitable learning, teachers share weekly lessons with our families and model how to use language from the program at home. In the end, we believe when our students feel safe and understood, they are ready to learn.

In his book, *Creating Cultures of Thinking*, Ron Ritchhart explains, “The opportunities that teachers create are the prime vehicles for propelling learning in classrooms.” The staff at CDM work collaboratively across grade-levels and instructional settings to create opportunities for students to challenge misconceptions, create meaning, and explore their individual genius. With the belief that all children can and will learn, our staff design learning opportunities with a “low floor and high ceiling” across subject-areas and grade-levels. As an example, when presenting students with word problems in math, students have a choice between several number sets to plug into the problem before solving. Students are encouraged to use the number set that feels right for them, meeting them where they are within their learning continuum. Teachers also use Thinking Routines and purposeful questions to scaffold and promote student thinking within all content areas and across grade-level spans. Students are positively engaged when learning is meaningful, provides for autonomy, and fosters a sense of competence.

Research has shown that a safe, participatory, and responsive school climate fosters greater attachment to school and provides the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Osterman, 2000). The staff and families of CDM positively affect student learning and achievement within distance learning and in-person instructional settings by engaging students behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

A high level of parent and community support and collaboration is a hallmark of the CDM culture. We believe that building relationships is critical to meaningful collaboration, and when all stakeholders feel they are valued members of the learning community, they develop a sense of ownership and efficacy that transforms teaching and learning.

Our families work hard to live in a community that values an outstanding education for its children and they make it a priority to be actively involved. This includes attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and Principal Coffees to learn about and provide input on the instructional program, participating on the School Site Council (SSC) to co-develop and evaluate plans for continuous improvement, co-planning community events and special celebrations, and in a typical year, volunteering in classrooms. While most of these activities continued virtually during the 2020-2021 school year, parent participation on newly developed committees supported our community with confidently reopening our school for students.

In August of 2020, parent representatives joined our staff and the administration in developing our site’s Safe Reopening Plan. This committee analyzed the health and safety guidelines outlined by the California Department of Public Health and developed site specific protocols for maintaining proper hygiene, ensuring

physical distancing, and limiting student mixing. This productive collaboration allowed our school, and those within our district, to become the first schools in San Diego County to reopen as a full-day, five day per week, in-person learning option for our students. Most importantly, it provided the entire community with the confidence that the ongoing health and safety of our students, staff, and greater community remains our top priority.

Another key shift that occurred this year was rethinking how best to assess and address the needs of our students and their families from a distance. Our parent committees collaborated with staff to plan safe community building and outreach events. One special event was the “Fence of Love” Valentine’s Day 2021 art installation, during which students created a piece of artwork to symbolize our motto, “The School with a Heart,” and display at the front of the school. Prior to Valentine’s weekend, families drove through the parking lot to admire the artwork, listen to music, and feel the love of our community. Additionally, in response to the growing number of families in need throughout our community, our PTA worked with the San Diego Food Bank and a local church to collect and distribute canned food and clothing.

It takes the dedication of all stakeholders to meet the needs of our students, most especially during challenging times. We remain grateful for the ongoing support of our CDM community.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Research shows that an inspired and informed teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. A teacher’s self-efficacy, namely the belief in their ability to effectively handle the obligations and challenges related to their professional activity, plays a key role in influencing student motivation and achievement. Our teachers at CDM collaborate with colleagues, the administration, and district staff to make shared-decisions around the professional development approach and the resources needed to promote a culture of continuous learning and achievement. The thoughtful planning that went into offering our teachers flexible learning opportunities that align with district goals and meet the individual learning needs of our teachers and students during the 2020-2021 school year, creates a learning environment where our teachers are valued and our students thrive.

The Essential Elements of Instruction (EEI) and Cultures of Thinking frameworks guide our instructional practice and professional learning opportunities at CDM. EEI serves as a set of research-based practices upon which instructional decisions are based. This includes supporting teachers with planning how students will demonstrate their understanding of content, and practicing explicit teacher actions that lead to high levels of learning for every student. Additionally, our district is working with Harvard’s Project Zero and Ron Ritchhart to create Cultures of Thinking within all classrooms. Most specifically, we are improving collaboration and learning by making student thinking visible and valued, and strengthening their understanding of content.

During the 2020-2021 school year, professional learning shifted from being offered in-person during the instructional day, to synchronous “live” virtual sessions after school hours, and asynchronous online learning that could be completed at any time and from anywhere. Teachers had autonomy over the professional learning they attended. Live virtual professional learning options included Cultures of Thinking, training on our English Language Arts program, instructional technology, and Cognitively Guided Instruction in mathematics. Teachers also had the opportunity to complete Leading Edge Flex certification on the best practices for facilitating online learning through an asynchronous self-paced online course.

Another important practice that started at CDM during the March 2020 school closures and continued into the 2020-2021 school year is weekly virtual (and in-person) team “check-in” meetings. These weekly meetings started as a way for the principal to check on the health and well-being of the staff, and by teacher request, continued as a means for casually connecting grade-level teams facilitating in-person learning with those instructing distance learning. These meetings provide a forum for teachers to stay connected and feel heard. Just like with our students, when our teachers feel valued, they can accomplish anything!

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at CDM is best represented by this quote from Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, “To lead the people, walk beside them. When the best leader’s work is done, the people say, ‘We did it ourselves!’” Over the past decade our CDM administration, staff, and families have partnered together in developing and modeling the systems, structures, and beliefs that form the foundation of our school’s culture. We believe in guiding decisions based on what’s best for students, nurturing a positive school culture where all students can and will succeed, and engaging in continuous improvement.

During the 2020-2021 school year, our CDM administration, staff, and families co-developed a Safe Reopening Plan to offer our students an option to return to in-person learning in September. The plan included such health and safety measures as daily health screenings, requirements for wearing masks, developing protocols and procedures for hand washing and the sanitizing of common use spaces, procedures for creating physical distancing amongst students and between students and staff, and a routine COVID-19 testing plan for staff. Equally important and desired, was an option for students to attend a full-time distance learning option. With approximately 30% of our families requesting that their students participate in distance learning for the 2020-2021 school year, six of our teachers volunteered to facilitate remote instruction. These teachers partnered with administration and families in supporting the daily instruction by sharing detailed weekly schedules outlining the synchronous and asynchronous lessons for the week, and hosting twice weekly Zoom sessions for parents to communicate the essential learning objectives for the week, address questions, and foster a connected classroom and school community from a distance.

While this work was herculean, our community rose to every challenge and continuously adjusted our systems and structures in support of the social, emotional, academic, health, and well-being of our students.

At the end of the day, it is the people within our school that foster a responsive and successful school culture. Our staff forms a family-like partnership with their colleagues, administrator, and parents to ensure that all students leave CDM performing at or above grade-level. Teachers participate on a variety of leadership committees at the site and district level, work in grade-level and vertical teams to develop lessons, co-teach, and research innovative instructional practices. Such experiences continuously challenge our staff to grow in their capacity, both personally and professionally. Over years of working together, our staff continues to establish a collective-efficacy around the mission of preparing all students to be college and career ready.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Our community of learners practice a culturally responsive pedagogy. We celebrate the identities and experiences of our stakeholders to support students with developing the knowledge and skills to critically engage with the world. Our staff shares a commitment to setting high academic expectations that meet students where they are, facilitating opportunities for students to learn more about their own cultural beliefs and backgrounds while also seeing into the lives experienced by others, and encouraging students to view themselves as agents of social change.

In any given year, the majority of our K-6 classrooms are composed of a combination of students that started school at CDM in kindergarten, and first-generation students that are newcomers to our school and in many cases new to our country. With 28 different home languages spoken on our campus and 12% of our students classified as English Learners, it is important that our teachers ensure equitable access to learning by designing “low floor and high ceiling” entry and exit points to each lesson. Additionally, teachers employ the Design Thinking process to create a throughline between historical events and modern day connections to promote civic engagement and student advocacy. For example, while studying about their own ancestry, second grade students realized that many of their classmates recently moved to the United States from countries around the world and brainstormed ways to help newcomers at CDM feel more welcome, including partnering new students with a grade-level peer at recess and lunch.

We are also fortunate to be connected with a First Generation Moms committee that not only

supports the school with learning more about the needs of our newcomers, but also encourages our families to get involved at the school by participating in special cultural activities within the classroom like the Lunar New Year festivities and family events including International Potluck. As a culture of thinkers, we embrace our diverse experiences and engage in ongoing conversations to better understand ourselves and each other.

In response to the escalation of everyday acts of bias and hate incidents in communities and schools throughout the United States, our district committed to moving beyond being “kind” classrooms to becoming brave classrooms through a partnership with San Diego’s Anti-Defamation League (ADL). During the 2020-2021 school year, a committee of dedicated staff, parents, and students have been collaborating with the administration to engage in anti-bias training with the ADL and earn recognition as a “No Place for Hate School.” The committee collaborated to design and implement school-wide activities that enhance students’ understanding of diversity, bias, social justice and inclusion, and promote equity and harmony in our school community.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

For many decades educators have sought to learn more about what makes a school successful. Years of research and longitudinal studies have been commissioned around such questions as: What are the specific academic, social-emotional, or culture-building programs that improve student achievement? Do these programs improve student achievement across all grade-level spans and educational settings? Is program success maintained and sustained over time and during unprecedented times? Century and Levy with the RMC Corporation defined sustainability as “..the ability of a staff to maintain the core beliefs and values and use them to guide program adaptations while maintaining improved or enhanced outcomes.”

As with most schools, CDM experiences staff turnover in any given year due to retirements, leadership changes, and relocations. However, a commitment to high-achievement is sustained year after year. If you visit CDM and speak with our staff and families, they will share in great detail our pedagogical practices that frame our daily work, and discuss our innovative academic and social-emotional programs which provide a cohesive scope and sequence for standards and skills instruction across our K-6 continuum. But at the same time, they will take great pride in sharing that we are “The School With a Heart,” and our heart beats in rhythm with our students. The most instrumental reason that CDM has successfully educated and supported students over our twenty-eight year school history is because all staff members share the core belief that every student has an inner genius and we are called to make student-centered decisions that provide all students with opportunities to reach their full potential.

Never has this collective belief been more relevant than during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the crisis shut down our schools in March of 2020, our teachers adapted their instructional practice overnight to deliver remote learning and stay connected with students. Our staff leaned on the strengths of one other to learn new technology to deliver and enhance our core content, and find new ways of remotely staying connected as a classroom and school community. As we looked ahead to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, we committed to doing whatever it took to provide a world-class education for our students through a full-time in-person and a full-time distance learning environment. While we continue to face many challenges, we know we are navigating through the right struggle because it is grounded in our collective commitment to doing what is best for our students.